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Discussion Document on Social Planning

Sinn Fein The Workers Party

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DISCUSSION DOCUMENT ON SOCIAL PLANNING

Introduction

Most political parties now recognise the need for economic planning. Such plans range from the comprehensive plan of Sinn Féin The Workers' Party to the more modest and partial plans of the other three parties. While there are fundamental differences between our view of planning and theirs, at least, there is a recognition by all parties of the necessity to plan economic developments.

In this document, we hope to show that such a need exists in the social sphere and we hope to point to priority areas for social planning. Since the abolition of poverty and inequality must be the primary concern of any social plan, it is with these related factors that we will start.

Poverty

The poor have been defined as those people whose resources fall seriously short of those commanded by the average individual or family in the society in which they live (these resources include access to decent education, proper health services, adequate housing, private means, credit facilities as well as incomes.) This definition gives a dynamic view of poverty in that it refers to an average standard of living at any one time. With this definition it is not possible to compare poverty levels in societies at different stages of development. Poverty in Ireland may be the average standard of living in some underdeveloped countries and people living at the poverty level in Sweden may be within our average range. Therefore, for the purpose of social planning in Ireland, poverty must be judged in relation to the average standard of living here. In 1972 Seamus O Cinneide estimated that between 20% and 30% of people in the 26 Counties were living in poverty. Unemployment rates have doubled since that time and there has been a contraction in many areas of social spending. It can be assumed that the percentage of the population living in poverty is at least as great today. Indeed with 33% of the population subsisting, as their main source of income, on very inadequate social welfare payments, there are probably more deprived people now than there were in 1972.

Inequality

In Western societies inequities between individuals and classes have increased in the last 30 years despite a massive expansion in the capacities of their economies. To socialists, who see this tendency as one of the inherent characteristics of capitalism, this is not surprising. Welfarism and the policies pursued by social democratic parties have done little more than blunt the harsh realities of this fact. Five per cent still own seventy per cent of the wealth, the same percentage as 30 years ago. In income distribution, there has been a widening gap between those on higher incomes and the lower paid. Even in access to education, housing, and health services, the poor have been getting poorer and the rich richer. People are still being discriminated against on the grounds of religion, sex, and age.

Social development and Class Politics.

Because of the class nature of society, poverty inequality, and discrimination remain despite growth in the economy. The poor are those people who do not have access to capital and private means and whose labour power is worth little or nothing on the labour market. These include the old, the sick, the disabled, the unemployed, the single parent families, prisoners' dependents, and lower paid workers. They

are those people who are of no 'use' to a social system whose dynamic is the maximisation of profit and capital. The resources this section of the people command being limited, they have no effective method of extracting concessions from the system. Sinn Fein, The Workers' Party must always point to the class structural reasons for this continuing deprivation and we must strongly articulate in the fore front of our policies of these people the demands for decent living standards. Poverty cannot be abolished under capitalism but its more extreme forms can be ameliorated by economic and social planning. Our party must have clear and resolute policies on how this should be done while at the same time maintaining the political position that it will only be after the creation of a socialist society that deprivation, inequality and poverty will be finally abolished.

Social Planning

Economic planning concerns itself with growth in the GNP, with industrial development and with job creation. Social planning in an unequal society must concern itself with the redistribution of resources and opportunities. Therefore, while the activities of all government departments could be said to have social effects there are some who have greater importance to social developments than others. Those departments concerned with job creation, fiscal policy, social welfare, health, education, land policy and labour have clearly greater potential for redistribution than those concerned with defence or foreign affairs. The activities of these departments should be co-ordinated by a social planning unit so that social priorities can be dealt with according to plan. Such a unit should also supervise other activities by government departments to ensure that their activities are not prejudicial to the objectives of the plan. For example, it should ensure that fiscal policies being introduced by the Department of Finance favour the less well off or at least do not create greater inequities than prior to their introduction. The last budget introduced by the Coalition created greater inequities and would have been opposed under a social plan. The social planning unit should be integrated with the economic planning unit or given the same governmental status.

Redistribution under a social plan can take place whether an economy is expanding or not. Indeed, it has been at times of social and economic crises that historically redistribution has taken place. During the last war in Britain the political will was created to redistribute resources and it was in the immediate post war period that effective redistribution took place. Similarly in the Soviet Union, following the revolution, despite a very low level of economic development and despite a stagnant economy there was redistribution of scarce resources. On the other hand, during the massive expansion of the capitalist economies in the 50's and 60's no real reallocation of resources took place between the rich and the poor. While the cake got bigger, the poor's share got smaller. This occurred despite the welfare policies pursued by successive social democratic governments in Europe and despite the anti-poverty policies introduced by the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations in the USA. Economic growth is desirable for the implementation of social policies, but in itself it does not create a more equal society; the prerequisite for which is the political will to abolish poverty and out law discrimination.